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TAGS: PGOV PREL ASEC HA MINUSTAH

SUBJECT: MINUSTAH SCALING DOWN OPERATIONS IN STILL VOLATILE
CITE SOLEIL

REF: PAP 1353

Classified By: Ambassador James B. Foley, reasons 1.4 (B) and (D)

¶1. (C) Summary: MINUSTAH military leaders provided Core Group members an update of the situation in Cite Soleil on May 20. The presentation was notably void of achievement and indicated force rotations would oblige MINUSTAH to scale back their footprint in the zone at a time when the area has become the anarchic core of Port-au-Prince criminality. UN representatives also reported on the Neptune situation and proposals for the renewal of MINUSTAH's mandate. End summary.

Overview of MINUSTAH Operations in Cite Soleil

¶2. (C) MINUSTAH military Deputy Commander Lugani presented a summary of MINUSTAH operations in Cite Soleil where anarchy seems only to have increased since MINUSTAH returned in force last March. Lugani admitted that "Operation Liberte" in December 2004 had reached but failed to maintain its objective to re-take the two police stations in the slum and re-establish state authority there. As a result, gang violence continued and the humanitarian situation deteriorated. In response, MINUSTAH began "Operation Raised Sun" on March 31, establishing 3-4 permanent, static checkpoints and 8-10 roving checkpoints surrounding the neighborhood. They also blocked other principal entry points into Cite Soleil from Route Nationale #1 with containers. Beginning the week of May 23, however, MINUSTAH was switching to "Operation Bay Espwa" ("Give Hope"), consisting of a significantly reduced number of three checkpoints, fewer troops, a total blockade of a section of Route Nationale #1 and more humanitarian missions.

¶3. (C) MINUSTAH military officials repeatedly insisted that the new operation was based on the decision of the HNP to block Route Nationale #1 in an effort to reduce carjackings in the area and elsewhere. The HNP said that gangs were using armed children to hijack cars along this road and then escaping with the vehicles into the small streets leading directly into Cite Soleil. By blocking a stretch of road that has been the site of numerous carjackings and is the main conduit into and out of Cite Soleil, the HNP (and MINUSTAH) claim they can put a stop not only to carjackings along that particularly dangerous corridor, but throughout the city as well by preventing car thieves from driving their spoils back into the narrow Cite Soleil alleyways where most stolen vehicles have thus far been taken. CIVPOL and HNP units (rather than MINUSTAH military troops as before) are stationed at checkpoints on both ends. Lugani said that since the road was blocked, the number of incidents in the area had fallen from roughly 20 per day to only 1-2 per day.

¶4. (C) Lugani's list of MINUSTAH accomplishments thus far in Cite Soleil was paltry: 1) a permanent MINUSTAH presence in the area, and 2) the establishment of checkpoints. He acknowledged somewhat belatedly that one reason for the switch to a lower-stance in Operation Bay Espwa was that MINUSTAH was in the process of rotating most of its troops and therefore had to pull back from the previous footprint there. After six weeks, MINUSTAH's to do list was much longer than the accomplishments: 1) gain more intelligence, 2) increase patrols inside Cite Soleil, 3) control Route Nationale #1, 4) improve cooperation with the HNP, and 5) begin civic affairs activities, including the establishment of a registration center in Cite Soleil.

¶5. (C) Ambassador Foley reminded Lugani that the original objective of the mission was to root out the gangs based in Cite Soleil who posed a threat to the elections process. He asked Lugani what the plan was for returning to that initial aim. Lugani said that the troop rotation would be complete by early June and MINUSTAH would again scale up with a new operation, with even greater assistance from the HNP. But he added that the terrain in Cite Soleil was difficult no matter how many troops are involved since they possessed only two (Peruvian) armored vehicles capable of navigating the narrow

passageways of the district. (Comment: Apparently MINUSTAH remains unwilling to conduct operations on foot. End comment).

16. (C) Ambassador Foley also reminded Lugani about the importance of communication and transport links within the port and warehouse district where, for example, the Embassy's GSO Warehouse had become practically inaccessible, and where much commerce was conducted. Lugani reported that MINUSTAH had received several letters from businesses associated with the Terminal Varreau and the warehouse district asking for greater MINUSTAH security and claiming that insecurity (and now the complete blockade of the main transport artery, Route Nationale #1) was preventing employees from conducting their work (septel). He said MINUSTAH had met with roughly 40 concerned business leaders to discuss the issue on May 18 and was continuing to work with the group and study ways to ensure better security in the area. He said the most challenging issue was maintaining safe access to Terminal de Varreau.

17. (C) Lugani finished by briefly describing "Operation Mariela" in Bel Air, in which MINUSTAH troops (who temporarily lost control of the zone following the February 28 pro-Lavalas protest) re-took control of the area (uncovering several stashes of HNP uniforms, marijuana and 9mm guns) and re-established street cleaning and medical aid programs. He added that the joint CIVPOL-HNP anti-kidnapping cell was up and running, and that "reported" kidnappings had declined from 14 in April to 3 in May. The cell had concluded that none of the kidnappings it had investigated had any political motive involved. He said that a group of HNP officers that had been arrested for allegedly participating in several kidnappings remained under investigation by the HNP and that CIVPOL was monitoring the investigation.

Human Rights Report on Neptune, Chamblain

18. (C) MINUSTAH Human Rights Representative Thierry Fagart told the Core Group that the IGOH was pressuring the justice system to move more quickly on the Neptune case. He said the judge in the La Scierie case had begun to interview witnesses (ex. Jocelyn Pierre and Calixte Delatour, Police Chief and Justice Minister respectively at the time of the La Scierie events), and that President Alexandre had told justice officials on May 19 that they must resolve the situation. At the same time, Fagart warned the Core Group that there was good reason to believe that Louis Jodel Chamblain might be freed even sooner following the May 3 decision by the Supreme Court to annul part of the Raboteau case (reftel). (Note: The Chief Judge of Port-au-Prince heard Chamblain's appeal on May 19 and ordered that Chamblain remain in prison. End note). In what Valdes labeled "the understatement of the year," Fagart concluded that it was evident that the justice system was under the influence of "some bad characters." Valdes added that there were rumors suggesting that Neptune and Chamblain might be freed at the same time, in order (in theory) to help the IGOH to minimize recrimination on both sides. (Note: Valdes joined Ambassador Foley and visiting Ambassador Andrew Young for a visit to Neptune on May 21. Neptune agreed to cooperate and as of the morning of May 25, Neptune arrived in St. Marc via MINUSTAH escort to answer questions before the judge. End note).

MINUSTAH Mandate Renewal

19. (U) Valdes updated the Core Group on proposals to renew MINUSTAH's mandate. He said he had already submitted a document to the Security Council (SC) on the situation in Haiti and that he was traveling on May 23 to New York to talk to donor countries and discuss mandate renewal with SC members. He said he expected the SC to request increasing the number of MINUSTAH troops by 800 and CIVPOL by 275 in advance of elections. He also said he was hoping for a one-year renewal in order to leave no doubt regarding the mandate during the elections.

Comment

10. (C) The situation in Cite Soleil demands more attention from MINUSTAH rather than less, and while the troop rotations are unavoidable, we fear that MINUSTAH still has no coherent plan for securing the important industrial zone, not to mention achieve its original objective of rooting out the gangs deep inside the slum who pose a threat to the transition process. We have already pressed MINUSTAH strongly regarding our dissatisfaction with the scope and efficacy of their tactical strategy in and around Cite Soleil. However, the hope that an increase in troop levels and the prospect of a more agile and equipped HNP presence may eventually achieve results remains just that - a hope, one which flies in the face of MINUSTAH's record of passivity and avoidance. End comment.

FOLEY